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Abstract

The twenty first century with its many achievements has not transcended the common saying that; the more things change the more they remain the same. This seems to be the case in matters of dress especially with reference to women's attire and the church. This paper examined the relationship between the church and the larger society, on the one hand, and the Biblical position on the other hand, with reference towards trousers as worn by women in Church during worship. The study is informed by the liberal feminism theory. This theory forms a lens employed to establish if there were individual rights and equal opportunities as a basis for social justice and reform in Christian places of worship. The paper submits that there is gender bias against women in church; a situation in which Patriarchy of the African society has been carried to, and perpetuated by the church through formulation of rules and erroneous interpretation of the Bible to favor paternalistic positions on issues of adornment and especially the trouser for the woman during worship. This translates to a church that is oppressive to the womenfolk.

1.0 Introduction

The role of many groups and individuals claiming inspiration or divine mandates from God as they subjugate others has become an increasingly visible- and often violent-factor of the global religious landscape. The issue of women dressing in trousers during worship in church particularly in Africa presents such an area of subjugation as it is shrouded in controversy and misinformation. The church, it would seem, sometimes has a controversial understanding of Biblical teachings regarding this issue; a position shaped more by the larger societal and cultural influences rather than the Bible. This paper examined the attitude of the church with regard to women adorning in trousers during worship and how the attitude had affected Christian women from the over-all perspective of gender dynamics in Africa in general and Kenya in particular.

2.0 Church's Understanding of the Bible on Women Adornment.

According to Genesis, in the beginning dressing was symbolic and carried a deeper meaning than what can be seen on the surface. Physical nudity was equally good and perfect in the beginning and that dressing came in after the fall of man due to shame and guilt. Bacchiocchi emphasizes that imagery of clothing extends beyond creation and restoration to include the time in-between. Adornment in cloth therefore began with the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. After the temporary covering of fig leaves with God himself providing a replacement of skin garments as clothing
It would appear that the bottom line with regard to adornment from a Biblical perspective, is decency regardless of the kind of dress a woman is putting on. It is always informing to note that even the Bible itself was written by inspired me including the books with female names. This supports the submission that, even

the setting in which the Bible was written was patriarchal. Women were not part of what was written in the text; they had no say. This also explains why most of the rules about dressing were so harsh against women.

All in all, there is very little in the scripture that spells out the proper way to dress for sacred worship. There is the general perspective to adore the lord in holy attire but this seems more an allusion to holiness that is God's and ours more than to clothing parse. Patriarchy, it would seem is deeply rooted in the Bible. This to a significant extent may be because Christianity was founded in the Jewish culture which is highly patriarchal. It is men who were forming the rules and women had to abide just like in any other patriarchal society. It is telling in this regard that most of the books of the Bible were authored by men making it unwise to expect absolute fairness and understanding towards the female nature and voice which is missing save for what was narrated about her on her behalf. For this very reason Jesus came with a voice of liberation for the oppressed that included women.

Jesus the Christ who is the author of Christianity is in many instances in the Bible is so particular about the freedom of the women and breaking the shackles of slavery off her existence. Such one instance is when Jesus healed a woman who had suffered hemorrhage for twelve years which was considered defiling according religious rules. This slavery may be seen from the perspective of social slavery where one does not have freedom of expression, association, speech and participation in within her society as the issue of dressing in trousers may symbolize as we shall see shortly in this paper. Needless to say, Jesus as the author of Christianity accepted all women and clearly was more concerned with replacing the oppressive law with the spirit for guidance as a way of liberating humankind from shackles of this oppression. It therefore with merit to argue that the church is considerably influenced by societal cultures that often is the source of misinformation and controversy as the issue of adorning in trouser during worship as a mode of dressing for women may confirm.

3.0 Societal Cultural Influence on Women Dress in the Church

Lesser esteem than the status of "man". Britan and Maynard in a related study inform this paper that oppression is indivisible, and notes further that often where there is oppression of women, there is oppression of the other out groups like religion in general too. Such segregation may assume various modes such as forms of dressing particularly those that symbolize freedom such as the trouser. A research in western Kenya by Amunga in 2017 about adorning in trousers by women during worship, that largely informed this study, found out that women who put on trousers during worship were considered deviant, immoral, and not fit to minister leave alone hold leadership positions. The said study further affirmed that culture was indeed a creation of man noting that whereas the wearing of trousers was not African in the first place the society which assigned it to men had made it immoral for women. The males probably assigned trousers to themselves because it is a symbol of freedom. It is therefore evident that men in their trousers sit and operate in a carefree manner whereas ladies are supposed to keep on watching out how they sit, with their legs crossed, lest they "sit like men". This is true in Kenya and Mumias Subcounty particularly that patriarchy is a reality. This patriarchy spills over to social institutions in the society in general, religious institutions like the church in particular.

Patriarchy, Leadership and Women in the Church

FGCK Membership and Leadership in Mumias LCA

Gender	Leader F (%)	Member F (%)	Total F (%)
Male	26 (14.44)	50 (27.78)	76 (42.22)
Female	18 (10.00)	86 (47.78)	104 (57.78)
Total	**44 (24.44)**	**136 (75.56)**	**180 (100.00)**

Key: f- frequency, %- percentage

Clearly, the leadership of the church in many parts of Africa is dominated by men. This position is ironical considering that women are the majority in the church. Isabel Phiri expresses this tragedy thus, "…women are visitors in the Church yet women are in the Church in Africa…."Phiri further adds that men have illegitimately held a monopoly over the church's mission for too long. This state of affairs according to

this author contradicted the liberating nature of the mission of the Church as Christ body upon the earth with a mission meant to bring life and not death, healing rather than suffering, and freedom rather than bondage. It is apparent in this case that the male who are part of the dominancy of the society have carried the same into the Church effectively dominating women regardless of the latter's efforts and achievements. The male in this way have turned the church into a discrimination ground against women. Relating this situation in the colonial history of Africa, parallels have been drawn when there was always conflict between the opinion of men and the commandment of God in which Women always had to choose between male political and religious authorities and what they perceived as God's plan for their lives (Wiesner, 1993).It is further noted that early modern women frequently argued that their religious actions were private and that only God could be the true judge as Christianity contained streaks of misogyny in which everything was controlled by male hierarchies with all levels of the clergy especially the highest reserved for males, and even God thought of as a male (Wiesner, 1993). Christianity in Africa has been characterized by gender hierarchy where women have been subjugated to social control and isolation from men making it an agent of women suppression. In this way Western imperialism which came in form of colonialism and Christian mission has also been a contributory aspect to the relations between religion and gender (Okkenhaug and Flaskerud, 2005).

Frequently therefore, colonial rule reinforced a gendered hierarchy of power and that national liberation in the post-colonial society did not necessarily change the patriarchal structures of the emergent African society. It is arguable in this sense that women's struggle for recognition and equality with men in the religious circles provide a possible perspective from which to make sense of the vehement resistance of the Church towards the wearing of trousers during worship by women (Thompson and Armate, 2012).A study by Amunga mentioned earlier, confirmed a relationship between the attitude towards a woman in trousers during worship and the societal cultural influence in church as dominated by the males (Amunga, 2017).

4.0 The Society, Church, and the Bible on Wearing of by Women: A Discuss

The adornment in trousers by women was vehemently prohibited in Mumias sub-county Full Gospel churches; a position that reflected more a creation of society (Church included) rather than the Bible parse. This phenomenon was closely related to the male domination evident in terms of leadership among other things. Forbidding women from adorning in trousers in general may have many interpretations including amounting to oppression of women right inside the church. These very rules that are dictated by men have their roots right from the society all the way to the church under the rubric of male domination. Women who wanted to be considered as faithful adherents of church had to adorn in ways that were acceptable to the dominants males. Worse still, even after dressing in an acceptable manner, they are still not considered for any meaningful leadership positions.

Further interrogation of these positions on women adorning on trousers during worship pointed out diverse interpretation of the scriptural texts as challenged by the changed contexts. For example, the scripture is quoted to say that a woman should not wear a man's clothing. This according to the study did not necessarily imply the trouser even though many respondents in the said study maintained so. The study pointed out in relation to this context that during the period of the genesis of the Bible, there were no trousers in the sense of the adornment as we know it today(Amunga, 2017). Furthermore, it is arguable that dressing varies from one culture to another and all religions including Christianity are culture bound. When a flowing rob is for example a woman's dressing in one culture, it may be a man's clothing in another culture; while a skirt may be a woman's clothing in another, it may be clothing for men in another culture as is the case of kilts for Scottish men(MacDuff and MacGregor, 2017).

Women adornment in the church attracts stigma, segregation and false accusations hinging on sexual morality. It was however ironical in this regard that a majority of women also maintained positions against fellow women adorning themselves in trousers during worship and even beyond this. The latter category of women it would seem, assist in perpetuating the oppression against fellow women as opposed to supporting those women seeking liberation in church as the Bible commands and as the dressing in trousers may express (Amunga, 2017). Trouser for a woman is increasingly considered as a symbol of freedom since it enables the woman to move about freely and go about their daily concerns with ease. It is a submission of this paper that the adornment in trousers by women in church during worship has little to do with one's spirituality. Issues of holiness and impunity should not be used in the Church to undermine the humanity of women. Any type of clothing can be both decent and

indecent based on one's culture, beliefs and convictions.

5.0 Conclusion

The issue of gender and dressing in has generated widespread debate that addresses the concern of women in the contemporary society. The use of trousers by women emerges as a symbol of freedom for the woman in their pursuit of acceptance, equality and happiness. This freedom ought to be extended to participation in the leadership and decision making in the church and the society as a whole.

Recommendation and way forward

To this end the study recommends that the church reconsiders its position on the empowerment of women toward realizing universal equality of sexes which is today one of the global social goals. These recommendations fit in well with the general mandate of the church which is to try as much as possible to bend the society towards the vision of Jesus Christ of a free and just human society. In this vision, women like the rest of the oppressed in the society, must be liberated.

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